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Delicatessen

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Delicatessen

(after Hurricane Sandy & 3 nights of no power)

In the delicatessen a last avocado.
Black, pulpy—a kind of soft grenade.

I set it down
for probably nobody.

I step out—not through doors
but through clear plastic tatters
shimmering in a doorframe.

Hothouse roses on the shelves outside;
hyacinths in foiled cups.

*

Calling storms by dumb names—
not the shabbiest way of neutering disaster,
I think.

Like the pit bull called Cuddles,
the Lovers' Lane near the sewage treatment plant—

Even *All Saints' Day*,
when you think about it.
Today, when I say, *I have it good*,
meaning, *better than others*,

& the children screaming *Help*
then *Made you look*, meaning
We tricked you—

*

But hyacinths in November!
You should see them!

Hyacinths make roses ridiculous by contrast.

Just look at the roses
hyperventilating in their cellophane shawls—

Pluck their cat claws & they don't object...

I want to grab someone passing & ask
the riddle that flowers won't answer—
how much beauty
comes from never saying no?

*

Maybe someone *will* answer me.
That's why I keep my mouth shut.

*

But not the sour-mouthed cashier—
she handles the bills,
she carelessly dabs the lemon wedge
she keeps by the side of the register.

Never a word from her.
Maybe the balances chafe
the tongue as well as the fingers.

She doesn't need to keep an eye peeled—
the cameras do it all.

If I could teach one art, it
would be how to go home unanswered,
empty-handed—

*

But what about the sidewalk Cyclops,

the all-seeing tattoo on the bald guy's head,
who once, I swear, called me by my right name,

who saw me frowning in sunlight—

*That & this so bad, Tyrell, you ain't
seen the darkest yet...*

The subway's closed tonight—
what darkest dark can he guard now?

*

I think I'd grow to like it—

the terrible wisdom
of stillness. The stomach, unchurning,
hollow as a prop.

The circles moving around them,
the cashier & the Cyclops.
The flowers too, if they can
reckon up anything besides their own mutilation.

Maybe they can sense
the babies wheeling by at warp speed...

who seem too light, having
little to them, or too much—an eye,
a name, some inarticulate rage,
all that's needed to be called a storm.

*

*And what's a blackout, Tyrell?
Afraid of roaches?
Maybe you'll make some new friends.*

*

And why hyacinths, why November?
Why rooted, not cut through, uncovered,
combining two colors?

Celestial blue, arterial purple,
maybe earth thinking both of heaven
& the blood in the sexes—

Thinking not only of a man-boy
turned into something beautifully inhuman
because a god looked at him once

but also picturing women
who know how to hide,

the woman in the jungle camp called
Hyacinth?

76, secreting herself
under a cot while the cult leader
in the pavilion makes nine hundred others
lie on the ground one last time,

& they won't rise again,

the cups on the ground like white flowers.

The toxins, red and purple in the cups,
around the roses of their mouths.

& Hyacinth who knows how to hide,
how to wait for the last to drink
even as the writer of the last note

summons those particulars
that are terrible for being so ordinary—

a gray sky, a dog barking,
a bird on a telephone wire.

White night, the leader calls it.

Stepping over the people on the ground—
Hyacinth & the moon
can rise in the white, humid night.

*

November then;
November now.

A kind of soft grenade
I set down for probably nobody.

Would I eat the goddamn flowers
if I thought they'd answer?

Made you look is all we can say